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1   The March 9 Group for University Autonomy is a group of Egyptian academics who, for the past ten years, have campaigned to increase institutional autonomy and academic freedom at public universities in Egypt. This article explores possible answers to three questions about March 9. First, what explains the founding members' inclination to form this type of group, given that most university professors in Egypt showed little interest in activism of any kind, and that there was little precedent for a social movement focused on this issue? Second, how was the group able to survive for so long in an authoritarian political context, and even to carry out successful campaigns, without being suppressed by the regime? And third, why did the group largely demobilize following the mass uprising of 2011?

2   First, some historical background is in order. When the Egyptian University (now Cairo University) became a public institution in 1925, it was given a legal framework that allowed it a degree of autonomy, e.g. by granting it a legal personality and enabling it to manage its own finances. However, the government retained considerable administrative authority over academic affairs. The issue of university autonomy was contested on several occasions during the following quarter century, with mixed results. The incident that the March 9 Group took as its symbol occurred in 1932, when the Minister of Education issued a directive transferring Taha Husayn, who was then dean of the College of Arts, to a position in the Ministry of Education. Husayn had embarrassed the minister by refusing to grant honorary doctorates at the government's behest. In protest of the decision to transfer Husayn, the university president, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, resigned on 9 March 1932, to no avail ('Abbas 2008: 76-88; Reid 1990: 120-125).

3   The military coup of 1952 shifted the balance of power decisively in favour of the state. A military officer became Minister of Education, and universities were purged of faculty members suspected of dissident views. The relationship between the state and public universities under the Nasser regime was similar to that found in other Arab states during the second half of the twentieth century: all real power over university administration was in the hands of the Minister of Higher Education, offices of the state's security apparatus were located on campus, security services vetted all appointments to ensure political conformity, student union elections were tightly controlled to exclude dissidents, informants reported on any suspicious activities on campus, meetings and demonstrations were prohibited, faculty members loyal to the regime were rewarded, and dissidents were excluded, obstructed, or arrested. This relationship remained basically unchanged, despite a few adjustments, until 2011. Ironically, when Mohamed Sakran, a student at Ain Shams University, wrote his PhD on academic freedom in Egyptian universities (1979-83), he was forced to tone down his critique of the lack of academic freedom and refrain from mentioning incidents that reflected badly on the regime ('Abbas 2008: 89-105; Reid 1990: 170-173; Qambar 2001: 135-214).

4   The March 9 Group consists of a core group of about 50, and a total membership of about 400 members, mostly concentrated in Cairo but with some participants in other cities. The group is probably known mainly within academic circles in Egypt, although its leading members have written or been interviewed from time to time in the press and appeared on television talkshows. Every year since 2004, it has held an annual 'University Autonomy Day' conference on a university campus on the 9th of March. For nearly a decade, using a variety of tactics, including open letters, demonstrations, and court cases, it managed to mobilize hundreds of faculty members with a broad range of political views, and to extract certain limited concessions from the Mubarak regime, without itself falling victim to state repression (Aboulghar and Doss 2009). Since the revolutionary uprising of January 2011,

leading members have drifted away, the group has not mobilized many of the young people who have gravitated towards activism since then, and it has not formulated a strategy for engaging in further struggles for university reform.

5   This article reflects the concerns of a strand of social movement theory that, in recent years, has analysed social movements in terms of the general social theory of Pierre Bourdieu. This school of thought aims to use Bourdieusian analytical tools 'to convincingly explain aspects of social movements that social movement theories, such as political process theory, resource mobilization theory and framing, acknowledge, but are not able to explain within a single theoretical framework' (Husu 2013: 264). To a large extent, this effort builds upon, and fills gaps in, the insights of classical social movement theory. For example, in resource mobilization theory, '"resources" have tended to be thought about either in terms of the networks that agents are able to draw upon in struggle (social capital) or in relatively basic material terms'; symbolic resources have only recently been acknowledged, and have remained under-theorized. Here, 'Bourdieu's theory of practice, with its notions of "cultural" and "symbolic" capital', has a valuable contribution to make (Crossley 2003: 57). Similarly, while classical social movement theory has been interested in competition between social movement organizations working on similar causes (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1217, 1229), and has begun to conceptualize this competition as taking place within 'organizational fields' (McAdam and Scott 2005), Bourdieu's more general concept of social fields offers a number of advantages (Ancelovici 2009). For example, it 'extends our understanding of field effects from the organizational to the individual level', suggesting that 'many familiar observations about the biographical consequences of activism should properly be understood as field effects, intimately interconnected and anchored in particular subsectors of social space' (Maryl 2013: 287-288). This is particularly important since the 'contentious politics' approach (McAdam *et al.* 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007), the mainstream successor to classical social movement theory, has focused mainly on organizations, and has very little to say about individual biographies.

6   Drawing on the interactionist concept of 'activist careers' (Fillieule 2010), scholars taking a Bourdieusian approach have analysed these careers as trajectories within fields. Some researchers employ the concept of 'activist field' (Péchu 2010) or 'field of contention' (Crossley 2003), while others prefer to situate activists and social movement organizations within other fields, such as the broader political field (Mathieu 2007; Ancelovici 2009). For our purposes here, what is important is that these scholars agree that successful activist careers involve the accumulation of capitals that are valued by other activists (Ibrahim 2011). These include specific forms of competence – such as familiarity with political concepts and mastery of the techniques of protest that have been called 'repertoires of collective action' in mainstream social movement theory (Matonti and Poupeau 2004; Mathieu 2007: 134) – as well as forms of symbolic capital (i.e., prestige and the authority that comes with recognition and renown). As Crossley (2003: 62) observes, 'having high-status figures patronize one's cause opens doors, for example, as does the (cultured) ability to articulate and present that cause in a manner that resonates with the middle-class "conscience constituents" who might be encouraged to lend a hand'.

7   On a more basic level, Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers an alternative to the Rational Action Theory underlying much mainstream social movement theory, making it possible to understand why certain actors mobilize while others do not, even though non-participants, if they chose to participate, would stand to gain the same 'selective benefits' as other participants. On this view, by studying individual biographies, it is possible to identify 'formative experiences' that make it more likely for some individuals to mobilize than others (Crossley 2003: 52-53).

8   In keeping with these concerns, this study is based largely on extended biographical interviews with twelve current and former participants in the March 9 Group, including founders, core members who have drifted away, and new members who joined after the uprising of 2011.[1] I will suggest that the founders' mobilization can be understood as the product of a leftist, anti-authoritarian habitus that was out of step with mainstream activism in the 1970s and

80s. Individual participants' symbolic capital appears to have contributed to the survival and successes of the March 9 movement, as well as to the loss of some of its core members in recent years. This symbolic capital included academic peer recognition as well as the esteem of a broader public of laypeople. Since activists with high volumes of symbolic capital are in high demand among social movement organizations competing for resources, they are especially likely to have opportunities to move from one organization to another. In this case, the uprising of 2011 produced vastly expanded opportunities for creating political groups. This seems to have enabled such activists to graduate, so to speak, from the March 9 Group and turn to more ambitious forms of mobilization, such as the founding of political parties. Within the limitations of a small-scale study such as this (involving interviews with activists but not with non-activists), explanations cannot be conclusively demonstrated, but the evidence presented here makes a plausible case for more systematic testing of this type of analysis.

9   Academic peer recognition is accumulated as part of an academic's trajectory through a particular academic field. For Bourdieu, each field has a certain degree of scientific autonomy, which is the degree to which it demands a specific competence as an entrance fee. Within each field, more autonomous scholars owe their careers more to their mastery of this specific competence than to any other advantages they possess (Bourdieu 2004; Bourdieu 1993). While the March 9 Group has focused mainly on the *institutional* autonomy of universities (i.e., the ability of administrators and faculty to manage the university's affairs without external interference), I suggest that the engagement of its leading members can partly be understood as an effect of their *scientific* autonomy (i.e., their reliance on career strategies based on scientific competence): they appear to be disproportionately found in more autonomous fields, and in more autonomous positions within those fields. They have an interest in institutional autonomy because it is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for increasing the scientific autonomy of their university departments. This places them in conflict not only with the state (in so far as the state seeks to control academic life), but also with their heteronomous colleagues, who have an interest in low academic standards, as discussed below. I will suggest that the resulting tension between institutional and scientific autonomy clarifies the difficulties March 9 has faced in pursuing university reform since 2011, and hence the group's declining level of mobilization.

Symbolic Capital and the Struggle for Autonomy: The March 9 Group and its Resources

Origin and History of the Group

10   Biographical interviews with several of the March 9 Group's founders born between 1940 and 1960 suggest that the idea of focusing on university activism, along with a preference for participatory democracy, developed among individuals whose habitus inclined them towards leftist political stances, but found themselves out of step with the prevailing types of activism in the 1970s and 80s. One reason for this was their anti-authoritarianism, acquired either through contact with parents' ideas and experiences (for example, the father of Cairo University mathematics professor Hany Elhosseiny was a leftist activist persecuted under Nasser and Sadat) or through critical reflection on the Nasser regime after its defeat in the June 1967 war. In contrast, the mainstream left had supported the Nasser regime, and in the 1970s, it still largely looked uncritically towards the Soviet Union for inspiration. Moreover, since political activism was forbidden, leftist student activists either limited themselves to organizing cultural seminars or went underground. As a student at the time, Laila Soueif (now also a professor in the mathematics department at Cairo University) was disillusioned with leftist groups that seemed obsessed with ideological purity and were torn apart by infighting, and she was uninterested in secret organizations, choosing instead to do only what could be done openly. By the end of the decade, the left, and non-Islamist activism in general, had largely demobilized. The student protests of 1968 and 1972 (Abdalla 1985), which some of March 9's founders had participated in, had not led to any sustained opposition movement. Elhosseiny (who is one of Soueif's former students) felt that no one had a clear project for social reform, without which

any political activity would be doomed to failure, and that he did not know how to formulate one, either. Of the March 9 founders I spoke to, only one, Ahmed El-Ahwany (a professor of engineering at Cairo University), was drawn to Islamist mobilization in his youth, but by 1976 he had become disillusioned with the intellectual 'backwardness' of Islamist leaders and shifted further to the left.[2]

11   Thus these individuals were open to experimenting with new kinds of mobilization. In 1978, several future members of March 9, who were now faculty members, began to work on challenging the university administration's dominance of the board of directors of the Faculty Members' Club (which acts as a professional syndicate). An informal network emerged from this effort, and began to meet on Wednesdays at the club to discuss issues related to the university. These 'Wednesday meetings' (*Liqa' al-Arbi'a'*) developed into seminars, open to all instructors. Participants in this group gained control of the board of directors in two successive elections, in 1982 and 1985. The Ministry of Higher Education then held an early election in 1986, and the Muslim Brotherhood's candidates won a sweeping victory (see Al-Awadi 2005). The Wednesday group then fell apart as several of its core members went to work abroad, at least partly because of 'social fatigue' (on which see Duboc 2013). In the same year, however, Elhosseiny heard the expression 'university autonomy' for the first time, from one of the Wednesday group's candidates, who told him about Lutfi al-Sayyid's resignation in 1932. Elhosseiny then suggested and helped write a campaign platform calling for an annual 'University Professor's Day' (*'Id al-Ustadh al-Jami'i*) on 9 March.[3] The Wednesday group can thus be considered an example of what Taylor (1989) calls an 'abeyance organization'; although it had little impact at the time, it contributed to development of these activists' thinking about the university as a legitimate focus of mobilization, and thus to the formation of the dispositions that would later produce the March 9 Group.

12   For some, universities abroad provided additional inspiration. Elhosseiny and Soueif both studied in France during their PhDs. 'During my time in France,' said Elhosseiny, 'I began to see how university autonomy actually works'. Departments had the authority to spend their budgets as they saw fit, the university president was elected, and the faculty were prepared to mobilize to prevent outside interference in academic affairs. Similarly, it struck Soueif that in France, there was no security interference in universities, nor did professors interfere in student activities. By 1994, when Elhosseiny returned to Egypt to teach at Cairo University, it was clear to him that the biggest problem in Egyptian universities was the university's lack of autonomy.[4]

13   A final common experience that focused many faculty members' attention on academic freedom was the case of Nasr Abu Zayd, a Cairo University scholar who was persecuted by Islamists, starting in 1993, for his work on Qur'anic hermeneutics, and who went into exile in 1995 (Najjar 2000). Former participants in the Wednesday group, such as Soueif, mobilized to defend him, and were joined by others, such as Mohamed Aboulghar, a professor in the Cairo University medical school who was a close friend of Abu Zayd. Nevertheless, some of those who defended Abu Zayd were not interested in defending Islamists persecuted by the security apparatus. Soueif, Aboulghar and others then began to feel that a group was needed to defend university autonomy and academic freedom in general. This was the nucleus of the group that later became March 9.[5]

14   On 20 March 2003, the day after the US-led invasion of Iraq, Cairo University faculty members, including some who had been involved in the Wednesday group, held a demonstration on the steps of the university's administration building, to protest the invasion and Egypt's complicity in it as an ally of the US. Some of them then met regularly throughout the summer and autumn to try to formulate a political strategy. They finally concluded that it would be too ambitious to aim to undo Egypt's subordination to US foreign policy, and decided instead to focus on improving the dire state of the university where they worked. It was Elhosseiny who proposed the idea of an annual event on March 9, focusing on university autonomy and academic freedom and commemorating Lutfi al-Sayyid's resignation.[6] The first annual March 9 event was held at Cairo University in 2004. At that time, it was impossible to use a hall or a room for any sort of event, whether on or off campus, without the permission of

the security apparatus. Aboulghar led a delegation of March 9 founders to ask the university president for a large hall on campus. The president tried to dissuade them, claiming that academic freedom was well protected. When they insisted, he asked them to give him some time to think about it; in reality, this undoubtedly meant time to ask security. A security officer whose office was in the university administration building, and who controlled the university president's fax machine and his international calls, instructed him to deny the request. The March 9 delegation then met twice more with the university president. At the second meeting, Aboulghar told the president that they would organize the event on campus whether he liked it or not, on the steps of his office if necessary. Meanwhile, Aboulghar and sympathetic journalists published op-ed pieces condemning the administration's stance. At the third meeting, the president expressed his anger at Aboulghar's attacks on him in the press, and Aboulghar replied that he intended to continue these attacks.[7] One of the administration's objections was to the use of the word *'id* (which is used for religious and national holidays) in the title of the event, since, they claimed, only the state had the authority to declare an *'id*. They were also concerned about any possible mobilization of students. Thus the president finally gave his consent on two conditions: the group must not use the word *'id*, and they must not invite students. March 9 agreed, but in reality they put up posters using the word *'id* (though the official invitations used the word *yawm* instead), and invited a student speaker, Kholoud Saber. The speakers were chosen to represent a broad political spectrum.[8] About 200 people attended, including faculty members, journalists, intellectuals, and some students.[9]

15   In the summer of 2004, the group successfully campaigned to prevent the demolition of the Shatibi University Hospital in Alexandria, a project promoted by the wife of President Mubarak.[10] In April 2005, it held demonstrations on several university campuses calling for an end to security interference in Egyptian universities, then gathered nearly 500 faculty members' signatures on a statement to that effect.[11] Until the revolutionary uprising of 2011, much of the group's work involved investigating and publicizing complaints about security interference in academic affairs, such as cases in which security prevented students from being hired as graduate teaching assistants because of their political views (often because they were Islamists), denied faculty members authorization to travel abroad for academic purposes, prevented seminars from taking place on campus, assaulted faculty or students, or investigated or arrested faculty or students on trumped-up charges (e.g. in retaliation for exposing corruption, or for political reasons). A few of these campaigns were successful, though most were not. The group's tactics in such cases involved open letters, articles in the press, and demonstrations, which were nearly always held on campus or at faculty clubs, as a metaphor for the idea that the group sought to defend the university from external threats, rather than to mobilize external pressure to impose its demands on the university.[12]

16   In October 2005, March 9 members participated in a demonstration for an autonomous and democratic university at Minia University in Upper Egypt. Six teaching assistants who had participated in the demonstration were then investigated (on the pretext that they had been absent from work, even though they had not actually had any courses to teach at the time). The March 9 Group sent letters to the university president and the Minister of Higher Education and received no response. Then, in November, the group held a press conference and demonstration in front of the Ministry of Higher Education in Cairo. The minister, 'Amr 'Izzat Salama, met with a March 9 delegation led by Aboulghar, who emphasized to me that under Mubarak, a government minister had to have close ties to the security services, and could not act without their authorization. In this case, Salama left the room briefly; when he returned, he said he had spoken to the university president and had the investigations called off. In Aboulghar's view, Salama must have called State Security first to tell them that the issue was causing a problem and to get their permission to drop it, then called the university president to tell him that security was willing to let it go.[13] The reasons for this striking result will be discussed below.

17   In March 2008, the group called for a countrywide faculty members' strike to demand a salary increase. Thousands participated in most of the universities in Egypt, despite the opposition of

the university administration and the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Mu'tasim 2008). However, the strike's demand was not met. Instead, a system of selective salary increases was introduced, supposedly on the basis of performance. March 9 opposed this system, and brought a case to court to have it abolished and to have the salary increase applied to all faculty members. The court ruled in their favour, but the ruling was not implemented until 2012, when faculty members' salaries were approximately doubled.[14]

18   In the autumn of 2008, March 9 members raised a court case to remove the campus security force controlled by the Ministry of the Interior, and to create a new, civilian campus security under the authority of the university president. The court ruled in their favour, the government appealed, and the plaintiffs won a final appeal in October 2010 (Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression 2010). The initial implementation of the ruling, at Cairo University, was merely a façade in which police officers were given civilian uniforms. Real implementation began after the mass uprising of January 2011. As a result, the use of campus security as an instrument of state repression ceased, and security personnel became accountable to the university administration. The transition to a civilian security force was fraught with problems of training, organization, and the lack of a clear legal framework, but the March 9 members I spoke to counted this court ruling as a major victory. The persecution of students for their political views stopped, and it became possible for faculty members to hold meetings wherever they liked. The approval of the security apparatus ceased to be required in faculty recruitment or in the authorization of travel abroad for academic purposes. However, the relevant administrative procedures were not abolished, and it thus remained possible that they would be reactivated.[15] In a context of frequent violent incidents at universities, partly as a result of widespread and increasing political polarization, public debates and struggles over the policing of campuses continued throughout the year 2013 (Cunningham 2013).

19   The changed political environment of 2011 also made it possible for faculty members to successfully press for a return to the election of university officials. On 17 February 2011, March 9 organized a conference at Cairo University with a Muslim-Brotherhood-affiliated organization called Academics for Reform (*Jami'iyyun min Ajl al-Islah*). About three thousand people attended, and the conference produced a statement in which one of the demands was the election of high-level university administrators. As discussed below, faculty members organized elections to choose new deans during the summer of 2011, but without a legal framework. In July 2012, however, the university law was amended to stipulate that university presidents, deans and department heads would be elected.[16] While this is an example of a successful campaign that March 9 had a role in, it paradoxically contributed to disengagement from the group, as we will see.

Symbolic Capital and Scientific Autonomy

20   Nearly all the March 9 members I interviewed said that they had never personally been persecuted by the state for their activism. This raises the question: how did a group of academics not only get away with holding demonstrations under an authoritarian regime, but also extract concessions from it, during a period when the brutal repression of dissent was routine? It seems plausible that this was partly because some of the group's leading members had a high volume of symbolic capital, including considerable academic peer recognition as well as the esteem of many laypeople in Egypt. As Aboulghar put it: 'March 9 included a number of prominent figures in society, such as the three or four best-known doctors in Egypt, who are known worldwide and have international publications... They are public figures who are well-known in Egypt and internationally, and this gave them a kind of immunity [*hasana*]. When we held demonstrations, security couldn't come and beat us up, for example'.

21   Aboulghar himself is a striking example. Now in his 70s, he is author or co-author of about 200 articles published in international medical journals; seventeen of these articles have been cited over 50 times, and three have been cited over 100 times.[17] His status as a pioneer of in-vitro fertilization in Egypt has also made his name 'a household word' there (Farag 2002; see also Aboulghar 2011). Hence it is no coincidence that on several occasions, it was Aboulghar who led March 9 delegations to meet university authorities or the Minister of

Higher Education. His symbolic capital placed him, and the group he represented, in a strong negotiating position. The group's need for individuals with this sort of symbolic capital, which takes many years to accumulate, could also explain why (as several interviewees noted) most of the group's members, and most of the core group of highly active members, have been middle-aged or older.[18]

22   The effects of symbolic capital may also explain the concentration of the group's members in Cairo, and at Cairo University in particular. On one hand, competition for the opportunities available in the capital favours scholars of the highest ability and ambition, to such an extent that, as Aboulghar observed, individuals with the sort of renown he referred to cannot be found in Egypt outside Cairo.[19] This seems to have made it easier for the authorities to repress dissent in provincial universities. Moreover, Cairo University, because of its history, has benefited more from this effect than other state universities in the capital, and has become, as Elhosseiny put it, a 'showcase' enjoying exceptional international visibility. This, in turn, may have given dissident instructors at Cairo University an unusual degree of protection from state repression.[20]

23   It also appears that certain disciplines with a high degree of scientific autonomy, such as mathematics, are overrepresented in March 9, while certain less autonomous ones, such as law, are underrepresented. For example, the 25 signatories of its first declaration included no lawyers, but included four mathematicians,[21] two of whom (Elhosseiny and Soueif) have played central roles in the group since its founding. The high scientific autonomy of mathematics means that the professional competence (cultural capital) required for entry into the field is both immense and very clearly defined, and, as Soueif observed, individuals who are adept at mathematics are extremely rare. Hence it is very difficult for a university to select mathematics professors on the basis of their political views rather than their competence, and indeed the Cairo University mathematics department has included students and faculty members with a wide variety of dissident political orientations.[22] In other words, their cultural capital may have given them a degree of immunity from repression, thanks to the autonomy of mathematics and the relationship between supply and demand in the mathematics department. The relationship between scholars' different forms of capital and autonomy and their engagement in social movements is no doubt more complex than these brief observations suggest, and merits more rigorous study.

Connections with Student Mobilization

24   Since March 9 is defined as a faculty group, students cannot be members. Moreover, the group has avoided inviting students to its protests, or has done so only in secret, in order to protect student activists from the accusation that they are 'directed' by faculty members. On the other hand, March 9 has held demonstrations in solidarity with student demonstrations against state repression of students, and considerable coordination has taken place on such occasions. Similarly, at the end of 2010, March 9, human-rights activists from the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), and students in the April 6 youth movement held a protest at Ain Shams University to distribute copies of the court ruling that required the Ministry of the Interior's security forces to be removed from campus. The university president sent thugs to attack the march.[23]

25   Elhosseiny said he thinks it is difficult to mobilize students around the issue of university autonomy, because they have little stake in it; most aim to leave the university, unlike faculty members, whose goal is to stay there. However, Manar El Kholy, a professor of anaesthesiology at Cairo University, observed that even students who just want to graduate want to get a valuable degree; in her view, they need to be taught that this will not happen if their university is mediocre, and that fixing this mediocrity requires university autonomy. Ahmed El-Ahwany pointed out that it is students who are most affected by the corruption of faculty members, and he expects them to be the driving force behind attempts to address it. Randa Abou Bakr, a professor of English and comparative literature at Cairo University, and Manar Hussein, a professor of radiology at Cairo University, added that an active minority of students is concerned about university autonomy in so far as it affects student activities and

student unions; they both expect students to begin playing a greater role than faculty members in campaigns for university reform, particularly because the students are more numerous.[24]

26   Kholoud Saber offered a nuanced perspective on relations between students and faculty members, having worked with March 9 in both capacities. She was a well-known leftist student activist when March 9 invited her to speak at their first annual event in 2004. At the time of our interview, she was a graduate student in psychology and a teaching assistant at Cairo University, as well as deputy director of AFTE, which has worked with March 9 on several occasions. She observed that, while students have taken a strong interest in, for example, the reform of campus security, some student mobilizations are inimical to university autonomy and academic freedom. For example, there have been several recent incidents in which students mobilized to accuse professors of contempt for religion, or because they felt that their grades were too low. In March 2011, student demonstrators' main demand was the dismissal of university presidents and deans appointed under the old regime. This caused a serious disagreement within March 9, and Saber was in two minds about it when we spoke. While the group's members strongly supported the replacement of these officials, some felt that this should not happen at the behest of students, because it would set a bad precedent that could facilitate violations of university autonomy. For example, student protests calling for the dismissal of a university president could be organized for purely political reasons. In this case, March 9's official position was not to support the students, but to focus on proposing mechanisms for electing university officials, which would have the effect of holding them accountable to faculty members rather than to students.[25]

The Limits of March 9's Form of Mobilization

Participatory Democracy

27   The group does not have formal leadership positions. Decision-making takes place by consensus on an electronic mailing list, and by vote at monthly meetings at the Cairo University Faculty Members' Club. The mailing list's administrators (Elhosseiny and Soueif) do not have the authority to censor messages or ban members. When the group was formed, Elhosseiny proposed this open, participatory structure because, in his view, it would have been difficult to choose a leader in a group that included several equally distinguished personalities, since it would have been awkward for any of them to lead any of the others. (Perhaps more precisely, none of them would have wanted to be in a subordinate position.) Similarly, in order to accommodate the group's ideological diversity, statements have been issued (with few exceptions) in the name of the signatories, not in the group's name. Soueif emphasized that this policy facilitates mobilization and the retention of members. In groups whose leaders issue statements on behalf of members, the leaders often fail to ensure that the statements represent the members' views, and the typical result is that members withdraw. In contrast, when the authors of a statement have to persuade others to sign it, they are more likely to incorporate suggestions in order to reach a consensus. If N members then sign it, one can be sure that there are N people who actually read it and care about the issue, and that if a protest is organized, it will be possible to mobilize that many to demonstrate.[26]

28   In practice, Elhosseiny plays a central role; he carries out the bulk of the group's administrative work, maintains its archives, and often mediates discussions on the mailing list. There have been recurrent debates within the group whether it should elect leaders. In the course of these discussions, some members (particularly Yahia El-Kazzaz, a professor of geology at Helwan University) argued that the absence of designated leaders resulted in the dominance of de facto leaders. Elhosseiny replied that anyone else was welcome to take over the tasks he carried out. The issue was put to a vote, and the majority preferred participatory democracy. In the view of Randa Abou Bakr, the issue was resolved in practice by making certain processes more transparent. For example, the group began posting suggestions for meeting agendas on the list, rather than simply posting the final agenda after it had been compiled offline. El-Kazzaz later came to feel that participatory democracy was in fact the better option for March 9; like Elhosseiny, he thinks it has been one of the reasons for the group's longevity. In this respect,

Elhosseiny contrasted March 9 with Kefaya, which was founded in 2004 but was disintegrating by 2006 because many members felt that its designated coordinator was monopolizing power (see al-Sayyid 2009: 46). For Manar El Kholy, who joined March 9 in November 2011, the group's egalitarianism makes newcomers feel that their views are taken as seriously as those of the founders. On the other hand, El-Kazzaz pointed out that a completely flat decision-making structure could not be sustained if the group's numbers increased significantly. Moreover, for Manar Hussein, one of the youngest of the group's founding members (she was in her mid-thirties in 2003), while this participatory democracy is admirable in principle, in practice it has given the group a frustratingly slow, 'bureaucratic' pace, characterized by endless discussions that lead to little concrete action; this is one of the reasons why she left the group in 2008.[27] These are arguably deficiencies not of participatory democracy as such, but of the type of participatory democracy selected by March 9 (see Polletta 2002 for a discussion of similar issues in the context of social movements in the United States).

Engagement and Disengagement

29 Any faculty member can join March 9 simply by subscribing to its electronic mailing list and stating a university affiliation. A core group of perhaps 50 members participates in all the group's activities. The mailing list has about 400 subscribers; with some effort, the core group can get most of these to sign statements on issues that enjoy a broad consensus.[28] This is clearly a very small number in comparison with the seventy thousand faculty members (including teaching assistants) at Egypt's universities (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics 2012). In Aboulghar's view, most faculty members have little understanding of, or interest in, university autonomy or academic freedom. The use of the word *istiqlal* (which means 'independence' as well as 'autonomy') in the group's name has even struck some faculty members as bizarre, as if the university were going to secede from Egypt. For Elhosseiny and for Madiha Doss (a professor of linguistics at Cairo University), universities in Egypt are a largely conservative milieu, and Doss stressed that few instructors are interested in politics. On the other hand, Manar Hussein, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists, believed it was a mistake for March 9 to focus on what she viewed as elitist issues. She struggled to persuade others in the group to embrace demands that were likely to have a broader appeal, such as raising the low salaries of faculty members. In this she had the support of Doss, who pointed out that low salaries forced many instructors to take jobs at multiple universities, and that the quality of instruction suffered as a result, and of Aboulghar, who argued that campaigning for a salary increase would enable the group to recruit new members who could then be made aware of the issue of university autonomy as well. In 2008, the group did participate in a campaign for this demand, as described above, despite the opposition of other leading members, who felt that it was unrelated to the issue of university autonomy and would be better left to the faculty members' clubs. Frustration with this debate was another reason for Hussein's departure from March 9 that year; she felt that the diversity of views within the group was so great as to prevent it from accomplishing much that interested her. The campaign for higher salaries did attract many new members, but most of those who joined for that campaign did not remain in the group afterwards.[29]

30 One early issue that attracted a large number of new members was the campaign the group launched in 2003 against the assignment, a year earlier, of a building on the Cairo University campus to the Future Generation Foundation, an organization headed by President Mubarak's son, Gamal Mubarak.[30] However, the campaign was not successful in removing the foundation from campus.[31] There was another period of rapid recruitment in 2005, during the 'judges' revolt' for the independence of the judiciary (on which see Wolff 2009), which inspired many people to turn to some form of activism.[32] The 2011 uprising had the same effect on a larger scale; after the conference of 17 February 2011 mentioned above, there was a huge influx of new members, including many with no previous experience of activism. Several have become highly active, but most did not stay in the group.[33] Indeed, March 9's level of activity has declined since the 2011 uprising. Two signs of this decline are that on 9 March 2013, few

people attended the group's annual event,[34] and that its web site has disappeared, because nobody has had time to update it.[35]

31   Interviewees suggested several reasons for this decline. First, many participants have drifted away from the group, while still considering themselves members. As Elhosseiny observed, 'Before the revolution, it wasn't possible to engage in politics via political parties, so those people didn't do anything [as activists] except work on university autonomy'. The opening up of the political field motivated about half of March 9's members, including some of the most prominent ones, to work on forming political parties at the expense of their involvement in March 9. For example, Aboulghar and Doss have gone on to found the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, and their involvement in March 9 has greatly diminished as a result. There are clearly strong incentives for the individuals that Crossley (2003: 61) describes as the 'high-status "stars"' of social movement fields – i.e., individuals with high volumes of symbolic capital – to move to increasingly prestigious, ambitious organizations, though they are not the only ones to do so when a field diversifies as a result of increased opportunities for the creation of new organizations. Without being an activist 'star', Manar El Kholy became a founding member of the Constitution Party (led by Mohammad El Baradei and launched in April 2012), and this limited the time she could devote to March 9. Soueif emphasized that since 2011, many activists have found themselves overextended as a result of engagement in multiple political struggles.[36] As Mathieu (2007: 149) points out, following Matonti and Poupeau (2004), 'activist careers are often marked by such transfers, in which competencies acquired previously are converted into another type of activity'. Mathieu argues that an understanding of such transfers calls for an analysis of the *exchange rate* of these competencies when they are transferred 'from one activist world into another, from the space of social movements or the world of trade unionism to the political field, for example'. I would argue that this applies to activists' symbolic capital as well.

32   Second, after February 2011, March 9 had to compete for members with a number of new faculty pressure groups formed after the uprising (such as the April 16 Movement), whose demands were focused mainly on salaries and benefits and on forming an independent faculty union, and who were uninterested in issues of university autonomy and academic freedom. Bourdieu observed that the successful entrance of new actors into a field often depends on external changes; 'the most decisive of these changes are the political ruptures, such as revolutionary crises, which change the power relations at the heart of the field' (Bourdieu 1996). Applying this observation to social movements, Ancelovici (2009: 55-56) argues that the appearance of new social movement actors within a social space can lead to the weakening of dominant actors. Similarly, Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 15) take note of the competitive challenge that established groups face when a field experiences 'invasion by outside groups'. In this case, the new university-focused social movement organizations had many younger members who saw March 9 as uninterested in their material problems. El Kholy notes that most of the people who approach her with an interest in joining March 9 are at least 40 years old, and attributes this in part to the fact that the group rarely organizes demonstrations or sit-ins. Elhosseiny and Manar Hussein also suggested that the age of the leading members, most of whom are over 50, leads to a style of discussion that young people find unappealing.[37] This is arguably a side effect of the need for the leading members to have spent many years accumulating symbolic capital in order to get away with this type of activism under the Mubarak regime.

33   Third, the 2011 uprising made protests a much more demanding enterprise. Previously, if 50 people participated in a demonstration, it would get a great deal of attention, and if 200 participated, it was considered a huge success. After the uprising, demonstrations on that scale were considered failures, because success was now measured against the standard of protests in which tens of thousands participated. Hence a small group could no longer be as significant as it was in the past.[38]

34   Finally, several interviewees expressed the view that the core issues that March 9 had focused on before 2011 had largely been resolved, and that the main problems at universities now had more to do with entrenched interests within the university, which would probably be more

difficult to challenge than state interference. Many faculty members have a vested interest in lax policies that allow them to come to campus only one day a week and work at another job the rest of the week, to earn huge sums of money by forcing students to buy their course notes (even though their salaries were doubled in July 2012), and to go abroad on secondment for many years while reserving the right to return at any time to their jobs at the university. Many are comfortable with a system of promotion that allows them to do little or no research after finishing their PhDs. Many graduate students are allowed to carry out research projects without anything resembling an academic methodology (though this varies considerably from one department to another). A large number of professors, particularly older ones, have based their careers on such practices for many years, and would strongly resist changing their habits.[39] In short, there is a large population of heteronomous faculty members who cannot be expected to support efforts to increase the scientific autonomy of their departments, because this would delegitimize their positions.

35   Sherif Younis, a professor of history at Helwan University who participated in March 9 mainly in 2005-2006, argued that society is broadly complicit in the dire state of public higher education in Egypt. Public universities are used mainly as warehouses for storing high-school graduates, to keep them from making trouble for the state and to keep them off the job market for a while. Many students see the university as nothing more than a way to get a degree with which they can get a job, any job, regardless of whether the job has any relation to what they studied. If a professor refuses to sell course notes, students complain because they have no idea how to study without them, because the notion of going to the library to learn from books has disappeared. Primary and secondary education have been deteriorating for decades, rely heavily on rote memorization, and do not teach students to think logically or engage in debates; hence the competence of undergraduates, and ultimately of professors, has declined as well. March 9 has focused on the university's institutional autonomy from the state, but this is only part of the problem of the decay of public universities.[40]

36   March 9's relations with the Muslim Brotherhood have been complex. It has defended Islamist students and faculty members who were persecuted for their political views. Two well-known Brotherhood cadres, Esam Hashish and Mohamed Sameh Hilal, are former March 9 members. They signed March 9's statements and participated in its demonstrations, but this did not lead to a greater involvement on the part of the Brotherhood, except on occasions when a protest concerned the arrest of Brotherhood members. After the 2011 uprising, these cadres left March 9 to focus on the Brotherhood's group, Academics for Reform. March 9 and Academics for Reform worked together on the issue of salaries (Muhammad 2010), and the campaign for the election of university officials was successful partly because both groups devoted considerable effort to it, but Academics for Reform did not show an interest in March 9's other priorities. March 9 presented itself as open to a broad political spectrum, but the Brotherhood's leaders tended to view March 9 as a leftist group and hence not as a natural ally. Younis observed that Islamists were unenthusiastic about March 9 because they did not share its conception of freedom; Islamist faculty members want to liberate themselves from the state in order to support their conception of Islam, not in order to support academic freedom in general. Hence when academic freedom means the right to study Islam freely, Islamists are likely to be against it (as in the case of Nasr Abu Zayd), and to mobilize students against it. At the same time, some activists who were hostile to the Brotherhood left March 9 because it did not take a stand against the Brotherhood. In an increasingly polarized political environment, the group's attempt to maintain a neutral stance did not satisfy either camp.[41]

37   A younger generation of March 9 members has played key roles in campaigns for university reform since 2011, but this activity has paradoxically led them to reduce their involvement in March 9. Randa Abou Bakr is a case in point. Before completing her PhD in 1998, she did not participate in any political activism, and had little awareness of the issues of university autonomy. She joined March 9 as a result of her opposition to the Egyptian government's Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project for higher education in 2003-2004 (on the grounds that it was a vacuous bureaucratic exercise that squandered the funds of its international donors). In the wake of the January 2011 uprising, she and other March 9

members decided to focus on pressing for the election of new university officials to replace those appointed under the old regime. She was involved in founding a group called the Democratic Committee of the College of Arts at Cairo University, which aimed to elect a replacement for the college's dean, who was due to retire in June 2011. Faculty members in the college decided on the rules and procedures for the election through discussions in large meetings, as well as through a survey organized in cooperation with the university administration. Since the 1994 law concerning the appointment of administrators remained in force, their objective was to put pressure on the university president to appoint whichever candidate won the election. This approach was successful at other colleges, but not in this case. In June 2011, Abou Bakr won the election, but the university president refused to appoint her, claiming that the Minister of Higher Education was opposed to her appointment. The minister claimed that it was the university president who was opposed, and attributed this opposition to the fact that Abou Bakr was involved in March 9, a group of 'troublemakers'. March 9 was unable to put much pressure on the university administration, because, as she put it, 'we were fighting on ten fronts at once' as a result of the tumultuous political context. In August, the Minister of Higher Education announced that a new law would provide for the election of university officials, but Abou Bakr was highly critical of the law in its final form, arguing that it placed unreasonable restrictions on voting. Although she decided not to continue to pursue her appointment as dean, she remained active in the Democratic Committee. She described this work as 'part of the vision of March 9', though she had largely stopped participating in March 9 as such; she felt it was more practical to work on these issues within college-specific groups such as the Democratic Committee.[42]

38   Abou Bakr's case should not be interpreted simply as a conflict between faculty members and university officials. After the university president refused to approve Abu Bakr's election, and after March 9 publicized the fact that he had changed university regulations in order to legally pocket a large sum of money from the university's distance education program, he was nevertheless re-elected, like many other university administrators who had been appointed during Mubarak's presidency.[43] In Younis' view, this is because many faculty members have no political orientation, and evaluate administrators purely in terms of their personalities, or in terms of some specific benefit that the candidate promises.[44]

39   It may also reflect conflicting interests among faculty members themselves, an issue that March 9 has had difficulty engaging with, like activists in academic social movements elsewhere (see Sommier 2010). Such conflicts are evident in the experience of Dahlia El Sebaie, a professor of paediatrics at Cairo University. After the 2011 uprising, she started a Facebook® page calling for hospital reform. The university's specialized children's hospital, where she practiced, was dilapidated, its administration was in disarray and lacked credibility, and corruption was rife. She had no previous experience of political activism, but had definite views on the improvements that were needed, partly as a result of experience working on USAID and WHO health services projects in Egypt. She joined March 9 in June 2011, and at about the same time, she and several colleagues formed a group aimed at holding elections to choose a new director for the hospital. This effort was successful; the group's candidate, Hala Fouad, was elected, and El Sebaie became deputy director in September 2011. In response to the new administrators' efforts to curb corrupt practices, those who had an interest in maintaining the status quo rebelled and organized demonstrations. Fouad and El Sebaie dealt with this by making some concessions, by retraining the most corrupt individuals and assigning them to roles in which they could do less harm, and by hiring a younger generation of doctors on the basis of competence rather than clientelism. El Sebaie was thus directly involved in struggles with academic peers who resisted reform even as her involvement in March 9 diminished. Indeed, she said that, in her view, corrupt faculty members were a more serious problem than state interference.[45]

Conclusion

40   This study has suggested that the analysis of activist careers in terms of capitals, including symbolic and cultural capital, can help explain the long-term survival, and the limited but

significant successes, of a social movement organization in an authoritarian political context, as well as the departure of prominent participants in a subsequent context of expanded political opportunities. Moreover, a consideration of the habitus of the group's founders lends weight to the idea that differences in habitus can explain why some individuals, and not others, engage in a particular sort of activism. March 9 was founded by academics whose scientific autonomy, leftist habitus, and discomfort with existing social movements arguably predisposed them to envision the university itself as an appealing focus of activism. By employing a simple form of participatory democracy that required very little commitment as a condition for participation, they negotiated a minimal consensus that made it possible to mobilize several hundred faculty members and avoid destructive internal conflicts for nearly a decade. Under an authoritarian regime, the symbolic and cultural capital of the group's most prominent members seems to have enabled the group to wrest some concessions from the state, while protecting it from repression. And by taking the state as its main adversary and focusing on the institutional autonomy of the university, it minimized friction with scientifically heteronomous colleagues.

41   Yet in the changed political environment that followed the January 2011 uprising, some of these advantages became disadvantages. The group's participatory democracy, and the age of its leading members, favoured a style of slow deliberation that was unappealing to the many young people who streamed into social movements in the wake of the uprising, particularly given competition from new groups that also focused on universities. The symbolic capital of some of March 9's prominent participants enabled them to graduate from the group to pursue other sorts of mobilization. And as some of the key problems of state interference seemed to have been resolved, it became clear that further campaigns to reform universities would inevitably involve conflicts with academic colleagues. The collusion of many faculty members in low academic standards and entrenched corruption illustrates the need to understand institutional autonomy and scientific autonomy as related but distinct phenomena. The further refinement of analytical tools capable of explaining the relationships between symbolic and other capitals, different forms of autonomy, and scholars' engagement in social movements is an important task for future research.

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Notes

1 I conducted all the interviews in Arabic, in Cairo, in April 2013.

2 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2003), and Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

3 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), and Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013). I am grateful to Said Elnashaie, who headed the Wednesday group's electoral list in 1982 and 1985, for clarifying the details and chronology of these events (personal communication, July 2013).

4 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013) and Laila Soueif (17 April 2013).

5 Interviews with Laila Soueif (17 April 2013) and Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

6 Interviews with Laila Soueif (17 April 2013) and Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013).

7 Interview with Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

8 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

9 March 9 Group newsletter, May 2004.

10 Interview with Madiha Doss (17 April 2013).

11   *La li-l-Tadakhkhulat al-Amniyya fi al-Jami'a* [Against Security Interference in Universities], March 9 Group booklet, 16 April 2005; *La li-l-Tadakhkhulat al-Amniyya fi al-Jami'a* [Against Security Interference in Universities], March 9 Group statement, 19 April 2005; *Hatta La Yatahakkum al-Amn fi al-Jami'a* [So That Security Does Not Control Universities], March 9 Group statement, 17 June 2005.

12 March 9 Group summary of the group's activities to date, August 2008; interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

13 *La li-l-Istibdad al-Idari fi al-Jami'a* [Against Administrative Tyranny at Universities], March 9 Group booklet, September 2006; interview with Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

14 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

15 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Kholoud Saber (18 April 2013), and Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

16 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

17 According to the Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge database.

18 A possible counter-example is the case of Saad Eddine Ibrahim, a well-known Egyptian sociologist who was imprisoned twice between 2000 and 2003 for criticizing the regime, despite having been close to it for many years. However, on closer inspection, Ibrahim's position seems very different from that of the prominent members of March 9: although he had a substantial reputation abroad, he was extremely unpopular among intellectuals and academics in Egypt, who saw him above all as a servant of the Egyptian regime and of US interests, and who resented his position as a 'tycoon in the world of research and development'. Hence few defended him when the regime turned against him (Abaza 2010).

19 Interview with Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

20 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

21 *9 Maris ... Yawm Istiqlal al-Jami'a* [9 March: University Autonomy Day], March 9 leaflet, 22 February 2004. In a message to the group's mailing list in June 2005 (groups.yahoo.com/group/march9/message/803), Abdelgelil Mostafa, a professor of medicine at Cairo University, implied that the dearth of law faculty members in March 9 reflected a tendency for the law school to function as an instrument of the security apparatus. Interviewees confirmed that the participation of law faculty members has remained minimal.

22 Interview with Laila Soueif (17 April 2013).

23 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013) and Kholoud Saber (18 April 2013).

24 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013), Manar Hussein (21 April 2013), Randa Abou Bakr (23 April 2013), and Manar El Kholy (24 April 2013).

25 Interview with Kholoud Saber (18 April 2013).

26 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013) and Laila Soueif (17 April 2013). See Polletta (2002: 2-9).

27 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Yahia El-Kazzaz (16 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013), Manar Hussein (21 April 2013), Randa Abou Bakr (23 April 2013), and Manar El Kholy (24 April 2013).

28 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013) and Laila Soueif (17 April 2013).

29 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2013), Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013), Manar Hussein (21 April 2013), and Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

30 Interview with Laila Soueif (17 April 2013).

31 The allocation of the building was finally revoked in February 2011 ('Ibadi 2011).

32 Interview with Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013).

33 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

34 Interview with Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013).

35 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

36 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2013), Mohamed Aboulghar (22 April 2013), and Manar El Kholy (24 April 2013).

37 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2013), Manar Hussein (21 April 2013), and Manar El Kholy (24 April 2013).

38 Interview with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013).

39 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Laila Soueif (17 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2013), Kholoud Saber (18 April 2013), Sherif Younis (19 April 2013), Manar Hussein (21 April 2013), and Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013).

40 Interview with Sherif Younis (19 April 2013).

41 Interviews with Hany Elhosseiny (14 April 2013), Madiha Doss (17 April 2013), Sherif Younis (19 April 2013), and Ahmed El-Ahwany (21 April 2013). My attempts to contact Esam Hashish and Mohamed Sameh Hilal for interviews were unsuccessful.

42 Interview with Randa Abou Bakr (23 April 2013).

43 Interview with Madiha Doss (17 April 2013).

44 Interview with Sherif Younis (19 April 2013).

45 Interview with Dahlia El Sebaie (24 April 2013).

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About the author

Benjamin Geer
Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore

Abstract

Qualities that can make activism possible under an authoritarian regime can become disadvantages when restrictions on the political field are eased. Under the Mubarak regime in Egypt, the March 9 Group for University Autonomy, a small group of academics, campaigned

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against the interference of the state security apparatus and the ruling party in academic affairs and campus life. This article suggests that the group's survival in that context, and its ability to organize successful campaigns within certain limits, depended on the involvement of highly accomplished academics, some of whom are well-known outside academia, on its practice of a particular type of participatory democracy, and on its focus on institutional autonomy from the state. All these assets became liabilities following the revolutionary uprising of January 2011, and the group has to a large extent demobilized as a result.

Index terms

Index by keywords : Egypt, universities, social movements, demobilization, Bourdieu

Author's notes